



News

European Ombudsmen at the Auschwitz Memorial

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“There is no better response to crime, genocide and armed aggression than the protection of human rights”, stated ombudsmen from over 30 European countries and regions after visiting the Auschwitz Memorial. The delegation, including Polish Human Rights Defender Professor Irena Lipowicz and European Ombudsman Emily O'Reilly, visited the Auschwitz Museum on April 29.

“There is no better response to crime, genocide and armed aggression than the protection of human rights. This is why we – representatives of Europe’s ombudsman institutions – call on parliaments, governments and leaders of this continent to decisively and effectively implement these rights”, that was the text of the statement the European Ombudsmen signed in the Museum Guest Book.



Photo:Pawel Sawicki

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The guests were welcomed by Dr. Piotr M.A. Cywiński, director of the Museum. "Auschwitz is a real antinomy of human rights. New legal order was, however, built upon this tragic experience after the war. It included such notions as genocide and crimes against humanity. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted in 1948 by the United Nations General Assembly also basing on this experience, together with the European Convention on Human Rights adopted in 1950", recalled director Cywiński. "In this way Auschwitz, as an important place for numerous individuals and institutions, is a particularly fundamental Memorial Site for European Ombudsmen", added Cywiński.

"Ombudsmen from all European countries protect basic human rights standards in their countries and make sure we do not forget what is the state and all its organization for. It should protect the weak and protect human dignity," said Prof. Irena Lipowicz. "Signing this declaration here, at the Auschwitz Memorial, has enormous power. Many of them are here for the first time. It is a very difficult meeting for someone who devoted all his life tracking even small expressions of contempt for man. The encounter with the enormity of contempt of the industry of death, the entire Nazi ideology, is very difficult but it is necessary to remember together and to confirm human rights here," she added.

The Ombudsmen visited part of the main exhibition, among others Block 4 devoted to the extermination of Jews by the Germans in Auschwitz, Block 5, where personal possessions robbed from the victims are presented, Block 27 – Jewish exhibition, as well as the crematorium and gas chamber in the former Auschwitz I camp.

Second part of the visit was devoted to the former Auschwitz II-Birkenau camp. The Ombudsmen walked along the ramp where the Germans performed the selection of Jews deported to the camp for extermination. They also saw the ruins of the gas chambers and crematoria. The guests paid tribute to the victims of the camp and lit symbolic candles at the monument in Birkenau.

The visit, which was a part of 10th Seminar of the European Network of Ombudsmen, ended in the so called Sauna in Birkenau, where the Ombudsmen signed their declaration.